

Folksworth Church of England (VC) Primary School

School Dog Policy and Risk Assessment



Inspiring a love of learning through
the bonds of **family, faith and friendship.**

Date: March 2025

Review date: March 2026

'A cord of three strands is not easily broken.' Ecclesiastes 4:12

Our Christian values of community, compassion, friendship, courage, hope and thankfulness are an integral part of daily life.

We believe that all people are unique and of equal worth. As part of God's family everyone is nurtured, valued and respected. We provide a safe community where we give everyone the fullest opportunity to be the very best they can be.

(School vision statement)

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Rationale

The value of pet ‘therapy’ is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding.

There is also evidence that “reading dogs” can break down barriers and help children to develop their literacy skills.

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children but that for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits. Any parent who does not wish their child to interact with the dog is invited to inform the school of their wishes, which will be respected.

Research shows that:

- The presence of animals tends to lessen tension in the classroom.
- Children from families with pets are better equipped to fight off infection, showing higher levels of immune system performance. When school attendance records were compared side by side, researchers discovered that children with pets averaged more days at school every year than their pet-free counterparts.
- Children turn to their pets for emotional well-being, with 40% choosing pet companionship when feeling down. Children were also found to seek out their pets when feeling tired, upset, scared or lonely.
- Helping to care for an animal gives a child a sense of pride and accomplishment, especially if the animal returns the affection. Children with pets have higher levels of self-esteem than those without them.

At Folksworth:

- There is an increasing number of children with particular needs and emotional wellbeing needs.
- We believe in promoting emotional wellbeing for all.
- Part of our school ethos is very much about caring for each other.

Appendix B sets out further reasons for why the school feels it will be beneficial to have a school dog.

Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment?

Of course there is, though there are a variety of accidents which can happen within the school environment which far exceed the number of injuries or incidents caused by a dog. Therefore, it is just another risk that needs to be managed. Guidance for managing risks is set out in Appendix A.

School Policy

The dog will be owned by Michelle Norbury. The dog is a Labrador chosen for its very mild temperament. The owner will be responsible for regular visits to the vets, injections and inoculations.

The Chair of Governors, and the Head Teacher have both agreed that the school can have a dog on site for the purposes set out in Appendix B.

Staff have been informed, through staff briefing, that the school will have a dog on site on timetabled days of the week. Parents have been informed by letter that a dog will be in school. At the start of each academic year there will be lessons around the school dog and parents will be given an opportunity to speak to the head with regards to the school dog. Folksworth Church of England Primary School has produced a risk assessment and this will be reviewed annually. The risk assessment is attached as Appendix A

In the event of an emergency evacuation the adult supporting the school dog will accompany her to the Fire Evacuation point.

Staff, visitors and pupils known to have allergic reactions to dogs must remain at a manageable distance. Parents are able to inform the school of any allergies on admission.

If the dog is unwell she will not be allowed into school.

The dog will normally be kept on a lead and harness until fully trained when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of an adult.

There may be occasions when the dog is working off lead, but this will only happen in an enclosed space and under the control of an adult. Before removing the lead, all present will be consulted

Pupils must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dog is present with pupils.

Pupils should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog. Pupils should remain calm around the dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Pupils should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up. Pupils should never go near or disturb the dog that is sleeping or eating. Pupils must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.

If the dog is surrounded by a large number of pupils, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation.

Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicate that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs she should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.

Children should not feed or eat close to the dog.

Children should always wash their hands after handling a dog. As a school we will provide anti-bacterial gel.

Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by an adult.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in School.

The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy.

Teachers and staff and children are required to abide by this policy.

The Health and Safety Officer is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance as and when required.

Appendix A - Risk Assessment

Introduction:

The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding. The team at Folksworth Church of England Primary School have been considering introducing a dog as a school therapy pet for some time and the decision was made in March 2025 to go ahead with the project.

The rationale behind this decision was as follows:

- For the school to have a pet that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow.
- For the animal to be properly cared for outside of the school day.
- To have a pet that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children's social and emotional development.

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children but for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits. Any parent who does not want their child to interact with the school dog is invited to write to the headteacher and inform her of their wishes. There are no diseases associated with the dog as her vet will be responsible for vaccinations, including rabies and completing regular health checks and necessary treatment. A copy of the dog's health records will be updated and available. The dog will also be insured.

The risk assessment below is a working document and will be checked annually by key staff and the governing body.

Risks	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dog getting over-excited when interacting with children• The dog gets loose from his lead or a classroom or leaves the premises• Dog's hair causes allergies• Children getting germs from the dog• Claim is made against the school re. the behaviour of the dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instil a sense of responsibility and respect for life;• Provide increased sense of awareness of the feelings and needs of others;• Show children how their behaviour and actions affects others;• Teach mutual trust and improved relationships with other pupils, parents and teachers;• Motivate pupils to think and learn;• Teach children nurturing skills;• Improve academic achievement;• Lead to improved school attendance rates;• Stimulate social integration and social competence;• Offers friendship and a shoulder to cry on for children.
The benefits far outweigh the risks. The measures identified below have been put in place to further reduce these risks.	

Hazard	Risk & likelihood	Impact	Controls in place
Dog getting over-excited when interacting with children	Low: Child knocked to ground Medium: Child scratched by dog Low: Child bitten by dog	Low Medium High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The dog will always be in the care of a responsible adult and will never be allowed to roam freely through the premises. Children are not allowed with the dog unsupervised. The dog is trained not to jump up or mouth the children. Children will be taught and reminded of consequence of actions as part of PSHE work. Pupils will be taught what to do to prevent a dog from chasing them (stand still, arms folded) The dog will have slow conditioning to the school, starting with getting to know the building and the staff and slowly being introduced to the children. The dog will attend vets and be groomed regularly to make sure her claws are kept short and she is in good health. Dogs Trust will provide free educational sessions with children about reading dog behaviour
The dog gets loose from his crate, his lead or a classroom or leaves the premises	Medium: Unsupervised perhaps causing the above	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The dog's bed will be kept in the head's office which is next to the main office. There are at least two doors between this room and the classrooms. Exterior doors will be kept closed if the dog is off her lead. The school building is secure so the dog will not be able to leave the premises. There are 3 members of staff who will be called upon in the event of the dog getting loose or if she needs attention at any other time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Miss Norbury ➤ Mrs Hibbins ➤ Mrs Reynolds
Dog's hair causes allergies	Low: Children have allergic reaction	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog will be kept well groomed and bedding will be routinely washed Parents have informed school of any medical needs or allergies through the school recording system. Parents have been informed of the dog coming in to school and have been given an 'opt out' by letting the office or the Head know if they do not wish their child to be in close contact with the dog.
Children getting germs from the dog	Low: Children/staff will contact diseases	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should the dog defecate on the school site a member of staff will clear this up immediately and dispose of it safely. The dog will be taught to toilet in a space where children do not have regular access. This will be the footpath area at the front of school. All immunisations, worming and flea protection are kept up to date and are the responsibility of the owner, Michelle Norbury. The dog will not go into the school dining hall during meal times and will not be permitted into food preparation areas. Children will be taught to wash their hands after handling
Claim is made against the school re. the behaviour of the dog	Low: School not adequately covered financially	Medium	School has public liability insurance that covers the presence of a school dog.

Appendix B - Reasons to have a dog in school

Behaviour

Behaviour problems occur in school and these can interfere with learning. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in pupils. In a controlled study, pupils were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Pupils' behaviour improved toward teachers, and pupils also showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

Attendance

Children can be encouraged back into school using caring for a dog as an incentive

Social Development

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils social skills and responsibility. Specifically, with a dog in the classroom, pupils have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving pupils in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The pupils also learn about responsibility, caring and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

As a reward

Dogs will be gentle and living, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the pupils. Those pupils who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, may be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities pupils will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem. Support Dogs can work with pupils on a one-to-one basis and will especially help those pupils who have been bullied abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. The dog will bring much joy and help to all the pupils they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the pupils they are spending time with. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

Reading

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some pupils. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. "It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. After all, a dog won't judge or correct you." Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud. With the presence of a "calm and well-trained dog," pupils find social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have pupils read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Research has proved that pupils who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in interpersonal skills among the pupils they mix with. Bullying can be a problem in all schools with pupils anxious about school for fear of taunting and abuse. But in some schools dogs are making a difference in the fight against bullies. Researchers report that pupils can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participation pupils declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%

Appendix C - Plan for presence of a school dog (TUESDAYS and FRIDAYS)

- To calm and soothe children who feel stressed, anxious, upset, angry or low self-esteem. Each class teacher will be able to nominate children that would benefit from time with the dog.
- Children can complete a form requesting time with the dog and a reason why they are requesting this/ what they would like to do.
- To teach children how to look after a living thing, such as grooming, walking, petting – each day a different year group will be responsible for the care of the dog. A list will be made of what needs to be done and staff can identify who does what.
- The dog can be walked at timetabled parts of the day under the care of Miss Norbury with a small group of children, where appropriate. When she is taken for a walk this will be done outside the school grounds and designated staff will pick up faeces, not children.
- The dog will be a reading buddy for children who lack reading confidence.

N.B. Where parents have shared that some children have a phobia of dogs. To avoid them feeling distressed and anxious whilst the dog is in school she will be based in the office area and will not enter classrooms without warning being given. By having set days the children will know when to expect the dog to be in the offices. They will not be asked to interact with the dog in a way which distresses them or makes them anxious.